My Aunt Eileen - Owen Brennan

Aunt Eileen's tea came strong and sweet,
her toast golden, always Ormo, plain loaf,
comfort shaped into buttered slices
Her go-to welcome.

The minute you stepped through her door,
she'd be on her feet, heading for the kitchen,
calling over her shoulder,
"Twa sups?"
Two cups of tea-
one for her, one for you -
and life already softening round the edges.

But it wasn't the tea, not really.
It was the tea-maker.
My second mum.
My lifeboat.

When I was wee,
and mammy sounded cross
or I thought I'd landed myself in trouble,
it was round the corner to Eileen I ran to.
She never made a fuss.
She just… smoothed the world over.
A place of safety you could escape to
without knocking.

Her children — Cathy, Marta, Frankie —
they weren't cousins to me.
They were sisters and brother
I slept in that house,
ate and laughed in that house,
… felt at home there.

She was simply, there.
When needed.
Without drama.
Not once.
Always.

One day she brought me to the dentist
because mammy couldn't bear to watch.
I was brave, she said.
Sat up straight, she said

I Asked the dentist,
“Will there be blood?”

“None at all,” he promised.

But truth leaks.
A single scarlet drop
landed on my hand
as I came round from the gas.
Eileen watching from the corner —
quiet, anticipating

I looked at that drop,
looked at him,
and with the same hand
punched the dentist
square on the nose.

“You said there’d be no blood.”

She smiled.
She understood that honesty mattered -
even when you’re five,
drugged,
and furious at betrayal.
That was my Aunt Eileen.

Another time,
She, herself came from the dentist
sore, swollen, bloody -
But still Ready for a laugh,

And with a wide open mouth grin
she asked all the kids
one by one for a kiss.
But they bolted,
Horrified.

“Sure Owen’ll kiss me,” she said.
And I did.
Straight over.
Square on the lips.
No hesitation...

I suppose we had history, with dentists.

And when the rest of my family
went back to Derry,
I lived with her
until the day I married Gail.
And even then,
every Saturday,
back to Larne we’d go,
because some people
are not a chapter in your life.
They’re the spine of the book.

Eileen...
My steady harbour.
My lifelong Saturday.

She was always there - until she wasn’t.

And to this very day

when I reach

for plain bread in the shops

it's always Ormo -

and I think of Eileen and me

sitting each side of her fire,

the world held steady

by a cup of tea,

And easy chat.

My Aunt Eileen — The Lifeboat That Made Tea and Toast

This spoken-word piece by Owen Brennan honours his aunt, Eileen McGinley/ Mullin, who lived most of her life in Larne, County Antrim. Eileen was Owen's mother's older sister, and her home stood just around the corner — a place where family gathered, laughed, and found comfort. The Brennans and Mullins were one big extended family, bound by shared streets, shared meals, and the steady kindness of Eileen's kitchen.

The piece recalls her strong, sweet tea and golden Ormo toast, her gentle humour, and her Larne-true phrase "Twa sups?" — two cups of tea, one for her and one for whoever walked through the door. Through stories of childhood, dentists, and quiet rescue, Owen captures the warmth of a woman who never raised her voice, never turned anyone away, and held the world steady with a cup of tea and easy chat.

Recorded and written as part of Words From Many Rooms, this work preserves the memory of a second mother and the everyday magic of family life in Ulster.

This poem and other material can be found at: Owen Brennan Archive at:

https://archive.org/details/@owen_brennan_archive